

SENATE RESOLUTION 338

(As Amended)

WHEREAS, the unprecedented challenge of the cold war has placed heavy demands on the energies and abilities of high government officials; and

WHEREAS, the requirements for policy-planning and decision-making in the national security field have placed a premium on knowledgeable, experienced executives; and

WHEREAS, the complexities and technicalities of national security problems have steadily increased the minimum period of government experience required before responsibilities can be discharged effectively; and

WHEREAS, brief tenure in office tends to have a harmful impact on the effective formulation and execution of national security policies, while the nation has been well served through continuity of service in office by other officials; and

WHEREAS, the problem of turnover has not been confined in its effects to any one administration: Now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That it is the sense of the Senate that individuals appointed to administrative and policy-making posts should be willing to serve for a period long enough to permit them to contribute effectively in their assigned tasks; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That it is the sense of the Senate that nominees appearing before its committees shall indicate their willingness to serve so long as the President desires.

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING CONCERN OF SENATE OVER TURNOVER
IN ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICYMAKING POSTS

Mr. Jackson, from the Committee on Government Operations,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

(To accompany S. Res. 338)

The Committee on Government Operations, to whom was referred the resolution (S. Res. 338) expressing the sense of the Senate on the problem of turnover in administrative and policymaking posts in the Executive Branch of Government, having considered the same, report favorably thereon, with an amendment, and recommend that the resolution, as amended, do pass.

Amendment

The amendment is as follows:

On page 1, paragraph four, after the word "policies" strike out the semi-colon and the word "and," insert a comma and add the following language: "while the nation has been well served through continuity of service in office by other officials; and"

Purpose

S. Res. 338 was introduced by Mr. Jackson, as chairman, for himself and the membership of the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, Mr. Humphrey, Mr. Muskie, Mr. Mundt and Mr. Javits. Its purpose is to record the concern of the Senate over the extent and impact of turnover in policymaking and administrative posts in the Executive Branch of Government, particularly in the national security field. In view of its constitutional duties with

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respect to foreign and military policies, and its specific constitutional responsibility to pass on Presidential nominations, it is appropriate that the Senate formally express its views on this subject. It is also appropriate, as the resolution specifically states, that the Senate--through its committees--adopt the practice of exploring with nominees their readiness and willingness to serve in office "so long as the President desires."

Background Statement

The turnover of top "political executives" has long plagued the Executive Branch of Government. This problem must of course be considered apart from the normal turnover which accompanies every change of administration.

As the resolution states, the problem has not been confined to any one administration. A recent study by the Brookings Institution noted that

too frequently, political appointees come to their posts without any prior federal experience and depart in a year or two without having served in more than one position. This has often been the case under the Eisenhower administration, as it was for its predecessors.

Any doubt as to the long-standing nature of the problem may be quickly resolved by a glance at statistics compiled by the Harvard Business School Club of Washington, D. C. It questioned 456 businessmen who had served in government and left sometime between 1940 and 1956, a period covering four administrations of three Presidents. Of this group, 48 per cent served one year or less. The median for the entire group was 1 1/4 years.

Likewise, the 1955 report of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government on "Personnel and Civil Service," through its task force, took note of

the high and increasing rate of turnover of top non-career executives, especially in the assistant and undersecretarial positions.

The report fixed the average months' service of undersecretaries from 1948 to 1952 at 23 months; the average service of assistant secretaries in the same period at 28 months.

Figures compiled for the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery tell the same story in more specific terms. For example, since the office of Secretary of Defense was created in 1947, it has been filled by seven different men (average term: less than two years). Nine men have served as Deputy Secretary of Defense since that post was established in 1949 (average term: less than 18 months). During the same period, six different men served as Director of the Bureau of the Budget (average term: less than two years), and six different men served as Under Secretary of State (average term: less than two years). Since 1953, four different men have directed our foreign aid programs (average term: less than two years).

These examples can be multiplied many times over. While they amply illustrate the problem, they do not indicate the cumulative impact of turnover on the effectiveness with which programs and policies are formulated and executed in the national security field. Any single departure may not have a significant impact. But in the aggregate, the numerous arrivals and departures have an inevitable effect on the attempt to develop the kind of programs and policies which only knowledge and experience produce. One can imagine the increased burdens on those who remained and the complications

for effective administration when, during one period of six months, the Department of Defense alone lost its Deputy Secretary, three Assistant Secretaries and its General Counsel. And the effects of a mass exodus of this sort are compounded by the complex interrelationships between departments and agencies in the national security field.

At the same time, the long and dedicated service of many appointees in all recent administrations must be recognized. The continuity of their service and their contribution is specifically recognized by the amendment to the Resolution adopted by the Committee.

Since its first public hearings last February, the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery has heard many witnesses, both from government and private life, dwell on the harmful effects of turnover in top government posts. The burden of their testimony is clear; that turnover--against the backdrop of the cold war challenge--has acquired the dimensions of a national problem and must be dealt with as such, not merely discussed and dismissed as beyond reform.

The Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, Roger W. Jones, told the Subcommittee that turnover had reached an "extremely dangerous" point.

The Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Dr. Herbert F. York, testified that

What you have to do is get people to come with fresh outside experience and hope that then they will stay long enough so that they can also build up personal knowledge and experience with regard to how to do things within the government. Rapid turnover is one of the most serious problems I think we have. Again this applies largely to the very top levels, the Presidential appointment levels. The average length of time a person holds his job, and this is not a new problem, is not really long enough to develop expertise at doing what needs to be done.

Marion B. Folsom, a director of the Eastman Kodak Company and former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, noted that

It is difficult to get able people down here. By the time that they get well trained, they leave. I know that it would be very difficult to run a business on that basis.

John J. Corson, a former Federal official, now a management consultant, who worked on recruiting government executives, told the Subcommittee that

Experience over the past 7 years in recruiting for and retaining high talent in the governmental posts where national security policies are formulated and executed demonstrates, with dangerous clarity, the difficulties our government encounters.

And he cited as one major area of difficulty the fact that

These critically important governmental posts have been filled by a succession of able individuals who serve, on the average, 2 years or less. In short, the men responsible for aiding the President to formulate and carry out this Government's national security policies are a very transitory group--not all of them, but a substantial proportion.

Testimony before the Subcommittee on this subject has stressed the growing intricacies of decisionmaking and program formulation in the national security field. The very complexities of our response to the cold war challenge--in all its economic, political, military, psychological and scientific ramifications--have accentuated the impact of turnover. As Robert A. Lovett, the former Secretary of Defense, put it

It takes a long time for an able man without previous military service of some importance and experience in government to catch up with his job in this increasingly complex Department (Defense). At a guess, I would say he could pay good dividends to the Government in about two years. Meanwhile, of course, he is becoming a more valuable asset each day. To lose him before, or just as he becomes productive is manifestly a serious waste of the effort that went into his training.

The present Secretary of Defense, Thomas S. Gates, Jr., told the Subcommittee that

From the standpoint of the ability to do the work, I would agree with a three to four year requirement as being about correct. I think you can only start to make a contribution after the first year.

And in his address at the University of Notre Dame on June 5, President Eisenhower told his audience that

Some frequency of withdrawal and return to private life would help eliminate the dangerous concept that permanence in office is more important than the rightness of decision. Contrariwise, such a tour should not be so brief as to minimize the value of the contribution and diminish the quality of public service. Normally, a four year period in these policy posts would seem to be a minimum.

The factors behind the high rate of turnover are many and varied. Some of them can be identified and evaluated at the appointment stage. In particular, the turnover problem can be reduced by ending the practice of appointing men with the understanding from the outset that they will serve only a limited period.

Some of the factors contributing to turnover, particularly financial factors, may be approached legislatively. The Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery expects to have recommendations on this subject ready for presentation to the next Congress.

In the meantime, the Subcommittee believes a useful purpose can be served through a formal declaration by the Senate of its concern over the turnover in top governmental posts and its intention--through its committees--to explore with nominees their readiness and willingness to serve in office "so long as the President desires." Such recognition of the problem will, hopefully, not only be a first step towards its resolution, but also help lead to a more positive public attitude towards government service.